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SUBJECT: EU FOREIGN MINISTERS: HAMAS MUST AGREE TO QUARTET
PRINCIPLES

¶1. Summary: At their regular informal "Gymnich" meeting on March 10-11, EU foreign ministers confirmed existing EU policy toward Hamas, insisting it must meet the conditions established by the Quartet. They also discussed continuing efforts to strengthen the dialogue between the EU and the Islamic world. Septels will report on their discussions on Iran, Ukraine and Belarus. End Summary.

Holding the Line on Hamas

¶2. Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik, representing the EU Council Presidency, and External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner both confirmed the EU policy that any new Palestinian government must meet three conditions: recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce violence and adhere to existing agreements. The two also defended the EU's decision to continue funding the Palestinian caretaker government, citing the need to support the Palestinian people.

¶3. Ferrero-Waldner said that the EU will review funding once a new government takes over and noted that the EU cannot exclude the possibility that Hamas is seriously considering how to respond to calls for it to agree to the Quartet conditions. She said that it was "far too early" to discuss whether the EU could possibly maintain contact with Hamas once it had formed a government. Plassnik took a somewhat tougher tack in answering a similar question, saying that the EU would continue its policy "as long as Hamas is on the terror list."

¶4. Both Plassnik and Ferrero-Waldner stressed the need to stand by the Palestinians during this transition period and to provide Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas as much political support as possible. Ferrero-Waldner said that the EU was also looking for alternative channels for continuing humanitarian aid, including the UN Relief and Works Agency and NGOs already working in the region.

Douste-Blazy on Hamas

¶5. French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy commented separately that there has been no change in the EU and French position on Hamas, but cautioned that one must also avoid "suffocation" of Palestinian territories and the resulting social, economic and security chaos. Douste-Blazy stressed that it was in the French interest to help the Palestinian people and to ensure that the administrators and bureaucrats are paid. Douste-Blazy also expressed France's continuing confidence in President Abbas. He called on Israel to

refrain from unilateral actions, including on the security barrier and settlements in the West Bank. When asked if the EU has seen any evolution in Hamas' stance, Douste-Blazy said that he has seen no sign yet that Hamas would be willing to foreswear violence and enter the political process.

Ferrero-Waldner on the "Dialogue Between Civilizations"

16. Ferrero-Waldner also addressed the EU's efforts to enhance dialogue with the Muslim world in the wake of the Danish cartoon controversy. Calling for steady work over the long term rather than a "new, catchy policy," she said that the EU must find a way to reach the "hearts and souls" of the population. Ferrero-Waldner pointed to several tools that could be used to reach this goal: strengthening the existing Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, using the media more effectively in affecting public opinion; working with the Organization of Islamic Conferences and the Arab League; making more use of the Ana Lindh Foundation, particularly with Asian nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia; and working more closely with the UN and UNESCO.

McCaw